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2. Please combine Figure 1, 2, 3 into one figure.  
3. Please combine Figure 4, 5, 6 into one figure.

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2. Please elaborate more on the ethnicity of traditional foods.

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# Riau Malay food culture in Pekanbaru, Riau Indonesia: commodification, authenticity, and sustainability in a global business era

Annisa Mardatillah\*, Sam'un Jaja Raharja, Bambang Hermanto and Tety Herawaty

## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to provide an in-depth analysis of the commodification, authenticity, and sustainability of culinary legacy as an instance of intangible cultural legacy, as well as how to subsequently compete with excellence and sustainability in the midst of a modern, global era of business without the loss of authenticity value. Herein is revealed the application of true local culture amid commercialization and modernization, differentiating between the authenticity and that which is out-of-sorts with local identity. The controversy of contextualization, the discussion of what is necessary, and the commodification of traditional food, namely the traditional foods of Riau Malay, to respond to the demand of a global market, are areas of interest in this study, as well as how the traditional foods of Riau Malay may compete with excellence and sustainability in a global market while retaining its authenticity values. The methodology used in this research is qualitative phenomenological; the interviews were carried out from the informants who were cultural figures of Riau Malay, social figures, and business actors in the traditional Riau Malay food industry with resulting evidence that confirms the necessity of heritage value of traditional Riau Malay foods, commodification in the area of globalization, without necessitating any loss of authenticity elements. The cultural heritage of traditional Riau Malay foods is introduced in two different types, cake pastry and main course savory dishes, and divided into two categories, everyday cuisine and cuisine for ceremonies or rituals. Riau Malay natives have customs and culture involved in the preparation and processing; presentation and consumption of the food may also be seen in the efforts in preparing such a traditional menu. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the literature and research interest in food culture.

**Keywords:** Traditional Riau Malay food, Food culture, Commodification, Heritage value, Sustainability, Globalization

## Introduction

Research into the commodification, authenticity, and sustainability of cultural culinary legacy in the global market era is currently quite the object of interest for research potential. An interesting debate exists examining the commodification of the legacy of traditional cuisine in the global business era. Commodification constitutes a process interconnected with capitalism consisting of an object becoming a commodity and market product [1]. Food is a market product that also undergoes a mobilization process along with the commodification in the global business era and results in new business opportunities [2]. However, those who resist globalization consider this process of commodification to be, on the contrary, an instance of hegemony and cultural imperialism [3], a

“McDonaldization” [4] that may lead to homogenization and a resulting “global palate.”

Cuisine constitutes an intangible cultural inheritance symbolizing cultural identity passed down from generation to generation, and its existence is a measure of the richness of the culture of a community [5, 6]. However, this sacred cultural value has now become a commodity of trade as a result of the commodification in the global market era [7, 8]. Cuisine carries the function of creating sustainable history and uniting a culture, due to its sense of shared ownership [9], to the extent that cultural commodification leads to pride and an awareness of one’s authenticity culture [8].

People’s cultural values may be seen in the variety and complexity of their cultural arts and in every aspect of their lives. Traditional cuisine constitutes an intangible cultural inheritance that is a fruit of society’s labor in a

\* Correspondence: [annisa17050@mail.unpad.ac.id](mailto:annisa17050@mail.unpad.ac.id)  
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57 given era, building on traditional knowledge proceeding  
58 from intimate experience with utilizing the natural re-  
59 sources that are available, in the comprehensive human  
60 pursuit of survival [10].

61 Culinary heritage is considered a global asset and a  
62 local resource providing opportunity to build up histor-  
63 ical narrative in social, environmental, economical, and  
64 political aspects [11]. Matta [12] states that culinary  
65 heritage is a shared ownership inheritance composed of  
66 a combination of material and immaterial elements of  
67 the said culture. These include dining etiquette, symbolic  
68 dimensions of food, material ingredients, and the ar-  
69 rangement of dining equipment such as tables, dishes,  
70 and the like [13].

71 Traditional food is a food product that, according to  
72 gastronomy, does not undergo a manipulated process [9],  
73 and having been passed down from a previous era, is in  
74 use up until the current time [14]. Traditional food is con-  
75 sidered to have relatively high intrinsic quality due to its  
76 historical element [15]. It is traditional food that carries a  
77 trademark quality of eliciting strong emotion, experience,  
78 and sensation in the midst of the people in question, such  
79 that individuals are united in shared feeling to a collective  
80 experience joined with that of the past [16].

81 Almost four decades prior, researchers declared that  
82 choice of food tends to be an indicator of social relation-  
83 ships [17]; a symbol of social caste, class, and hierarchy  
84 [18]; and a metaphor of building up the ethnicity and  
85 identity of a given culture [19].

86 Furthermore, based on [20], food also functions as a  
87 marker of the identity of individuals and groups of people,  
88 because food can communicate classes, community, eth-  
89 nic groups, lifestyle, and other social classes. Social class  
90 groups, ethnic groups, and lifestyles determine the choice  
91 of food they consume. Therefore, food choices in individ-  
92 uals and groups can create eating habits.

93 Similar to previous studies, Kittler et al. [21] shown that  
94 the habit of determining food choices is also known as a  
95 food culture that describes the way humans determine food  
96 choices, starting from how food is chosen, obtained, pre-  
97 pared, served, and eaten. Food culture is the food choices  
98 that are also determined by the complexity of personal, eco-  
99 nomic, religious and ethnicity finally reflects values and  
100 habits [22]. Furthermore, Tarr [22] emphasizes that the  
101 process of food culture is not only a small part of the cul-  
102 ture but is a whole form of the food culture itself.

103 In the modern global era, people's lives have come to  
104 be shaped not only by the conditions of the immediate  
105 local environment, but more and more by the modern  
106 world. Globalization brings forth the conflict between  
107 local and global environments and may result in the crea-  
108 tion of either homogeneity or heterogeneity [23].

109 Globalization of food products influences the actions of  
110 people in affecting their choice of food for consumption

and triggers commodification. According to [24], global 111  
values are part of a process leading to the disappearance 112  
of local values. Whereas [25] argues that globalization 113  
constitutes an opportunity to reaffirm local cultural iden- 114  
tity in order to be better known in the multifaceted world, 115  
the draw of the strength of local culture now being of 116  
greater importance amid the monotonous homogeneity of 117  
society's life due to globalization. Local values can inspire 118  
local culture, which emerge from life values, which in turn 119  
give meaning to life. 120

Therefore, Kwon [26] emphasized, currently, the glo- 121  
bal community in deciding on the food choices they 122  
consume which is interesting in choosing food products 123  
that based on history, cultural, and geographical features 124  
so the meaning of these choices is shown that they do 125  
not just eat the food products but also they learn about 126  
the culture, history, and geography contained in these 127  
foods of each country around the world. 128

The dissatisfaction of society with the homogeneity of 129  
globalization gives strength to traditional cuisine being 130  
seen as holding significant economic benefit with the 131  
potential to become a unique and expensive commodity 132  
[11]. The rise in interest in traditional cuisine has spread 133  
to all business sectors, to producers and to consumers, 134  
both industrial as well as retail sectors [5, 26, 27]. 135

From the consumers' perspective, interest in food 136  
choices is seen as emerging from social change in the era 137  
of globalization and the increase in the industrialization of 138  
the food sector [5]. Valuing a plethora of traditional foods 139  
is one way we can preserve them from extinction, and at 140  
the same time, commercialization of traditional food in 141  
the direction of modernization has discredited the per- 142  
spective of the preservationist [29]. 143

According to the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the 144  
Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, *intangible* 145  
*cultural heritage* is defined as follows: 146

The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, 147  
skills-as well as the instruments, objects, artefact and 148  
cultural spaces associated there with p that communities, 149  
groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as 150  
part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural 151  
heritage, transmitted from generation, is constantly 152  
recreated by communities and groups in response to 153  
their environment, their interaction with nature and 154  
their history, and provides them with a sense of identity 155  
and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural 156  
diversity and human creativity (UNESCO, 2003). 157

Currently, the issue of the commodification of tradi- 158  
tional food heading toward commercialization and 159  
modernization, in the case of Riau Malay, in this era of 160  
globalization, has become a serious issue, not only among 161  
traditional Riau Malay society, but also in the business 162

163 sector. The dilemma between the paradox of preserving  
164 authenticity cultural identity and values carried in the cu-  
165 linary heritage, and the demands of commodification in  
166 the global market, causes identity confusion to arise,  
167 which eventually leads to the loss of tradition and identity.  
168 Change in market interests causes the actors in the Riau  
169 Malay traditional food business to engage in commodifica-  
170 tion in various aspects, such as varying food flavors and  
171 preparation methods.

172 In this article, the researchers explore the commodifi-  
173 cation of the culture of Riau Malay traditional food in  
174 terms of historical value (HV) [9, 30–33], the commodi-  
175 fication of culinary heritage as an intangible cultural  
176 heritage, and how to be able to compete with excellence  
177 and sustainability amid the modernization of the global  
178 business era, needing not only to survive in the competi-  
179 tion of the global market, but also to retain the authenti-  
180 city identity of the Riau Malay traditional food itself.  
181 This is seen in the cultural practice of a decision-making  
182 process identifying authentic foods and those which are  
183 not in accordance with true local identity. Next, the  
184 question is whether in the context of traditional Riau  
185 Malay food commodification is necessary to respond to  
186 the demands of a global market. Given these questions,  
187 this research is of great interest, since among previous  
188 works of research, none focus on the commodification  
189 and sustainability of traditional Riau Malay food in the  
190 global business era in connection with the questions  
191 raised by previous researchers. Although it is evident  
192 that identifying the dimensions of a cultural heritage is a  
193 challenging task, necessitating memory, tradition, iden-  
194 tity, change, and behavior, to raise up a local culture to  
195 become a premium product valued outside its place of  
196 origin [11], nevertheless, at its core, the confusion be-  
197 tween guarding tradition and the commodification of  
198 cultural tradition needs to be investigated more seri-  
199 ously, so that the traditional food of Riau Malay will be  
200 able to compete in the modern world without losing its  
201 identity and authenticity, but rather strengthen its iden-  
202 tity and authenticity in the global market for the sake of  
203 sustainable excellence.

## 204 **Materials and methods**

205 This study uses a phenomenological approach. The  
206 choice of this approach is designed to better describe  
207 concepts or phenomena; by the way, people involved in  
208 these phenomena explore human life experiences to find  
209 the essence of the meaning of that experience [35]. The  
210 sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with  
211 the aim of the research. Representative research subjects  
212 were selected based on available information and data.  
213 Data collection is done through observation, in-depth  
214 interviews, documentation, and focus group discussions  
215 (FGD). Observations were carried out with the aim of

creating an original description of the field conditions in 216  
the cultural heritage of traditional Malay Riau food. We 217  
make observations on the kinds of traditional Riau 218  
Malay foods, starting from history, how to cook, ingredi- 219  
ents, original taste, and commodification. Interviews and 220  
FGDs were conducted with a number of informants to 221  
get a comprehensive picture of their perceptions, re- 222  
sponses, and attitudes toward the commodification and 223  
sustainability of traditional food cultural heritage. 224

Informants were figures from Riau Malay culture, so- 225  
cial figures and business people in the Riau Malay tradi- 226  
tional food industry. We asked the leaders of Riau 227  
Malay culture about the history and philosophy of tradi- 228  
tional Malay Riau food, cooking methods according to 229  
the legacy of the past, the taste of authenticity of food, 230  
also reviewing a scientific paper and literature of tradi- 231  
tional Riau Malay Food. The pictures in this were taken 232  
from some literature. Our data analysis method follows 233  
[36] as a model of interactive and comparative analysis, 234  
compared to previous research work. 235

## 236 **Result and discussion**

### 237 **Understanding heritage values in the food culture of** 238 **traditional Riau Malay food**

Over the past decade, it has been known from previous 239  
studies on food culture both from a food perspective is an 240  
identity culture and company emphasizing food culture as 241  
an advantage for sustainability in global competition. Liu 242  
et al. [37] emphasized that food culture is a technology, a 243  
science where there is art in the development and process- 244  
ing of food ingredients including production and consump- 245  
tion activities, besides that there are habits and tradi- 246  
tions as thoughts born on a diet consisting of a combina- 247  
tion of process and food production functions. 248

Meanwhile, previous studies of management company 249  
focus emphasized food culture as the uniqueness of the 250  
value of cultural diversity of authenticity as a strength 251  
for companies to gain a market competition [36, 37]. 252  
Furthermore, Wang [39] emphasized that food culture is 253  
an accumulation of local culture as authenticity from 254  
cultural heritage. In addition, [40] shown culture as hu- 255  
man intellectual thinking originating from the legacy of 256  
the previous generation and can be passed on to the 257  
next generation. 258

Based on previous research, this study emphasizes the 259  
heritage value of authenticity as a food culture which is 260  
a unique habit for human life that has differences in 261  
each region. In the context of Malay food culture in 262  
Riau, there is a habitual way of being called food culture 263  
in processing and eating food, cultural heritage obtained 264  
from the past cultural heritage as heritage value from 265  
generation to generation. 266

However, food culture is from the habit of humans be- 267  
ing prepared how to eat their food into a culture of 268

269 regional identity that is formed from the process of be-  
270 liefs, values, norms, and social classes that identify cul-  
271 ture as part of the human self itself. For indigenous  
272 Malay Riau people, food creates a Malay cultural identity  
273 where they believe that a distinctive taste will reflect the  
274 cultural identity of a strong Riau Malay community.

275 We believe that the type of food chosen for person's  
276 meal reflects their identity. Similar to [21] which empha-  
277 sizes that food serves as an important symbol of identity  
278 culture, in addition [21] to the appropriate food choices  
279 in people's habits of each cultural community often re-  
280 lated to religious beliefs or ethnic behavior, it signifies  
281 cultural identity affirmation related to food choices  
282 which also signifies collective association as a combin-  
283 ation of cultural identity beyond self-identification. For  
284 example, Riau Malay people do not eat pork or pork oil  
285 content in their food and there is no mixture of alcohol  
286 or the like because they are related to the Islamic reli-  
287 gion that they believe prohibits them from consuming  
288 these foods. Halal food according to Islamic religious be-  
289 liefs is a mandatory choice that is prioritized in daily  
290 consumption.

291 Furthermore, food culture in eating the main course  
292 affirms the cultural identity of Malay Riau. Makan Beri-  
293 dang is sitting in a row together on the floor with long  
294 clothes like sheets. Food is arranged on a round tray.  
295 Rounded shapes symbolize that there is no rectangular  
296 angle which is believed to hinder togetherness. The  
297 meaning of the value of simplicity and togetherness  
298 maintains harmony between people.

299 In addition to the Malay food culture, it is inseparable  
300 from Islamic religious law, wherein in one tray, the meal  
301 must contain 5 adults or 7 children, to always remember  
302 the five pillars of Islam. Serving begins with serving  
303 water and rice, and the plate is then covered with a dish.  
304 In addition, Riau Malay food must prioritize Halal as  
305 value contained in Islamic Sharia. Riau Malay food does  
306 not use preservatives or chemical food coloring because  
307 Riau Malay people believe that choosing healthy foods  
308 generates a healthy body and soul.

309 Cultural identity in the current era of globalization has  
310 become a dilemma that is considered from the story of  
311 past history while globalization is often associated with  
312 changes in the environment that dynamically talk about  
313 homogeneity. Homogeneity is a process of equality be-  
314 tween local cultures that contain cultural identity with  
315 modern culture. This homogeneity is feared to eliminate  
316 the identity of the local culture as a source of unique dis-  
317 tinguishing strengths from various ethnic backgrounds. It  
318 similarly appeared in the context of food selection that re-  
319 flects the cultural identity of a community group.

320 Regarding the context of the current situation of trad-  
321 itional Riau Malay food, it currently appears to be in a state  
322 of dilemma, between protecting tradition and allowing

323 commodification of tradition to develop freely. The pres- 323  
324 ence of modern foods as a result of modernization proffers 324  
325 its own allure as a local business opportunity for those who 325  
326 would align with it via the commercialization of traditional 326  
327 food in the direction of modernization. This phenomenon 327  
328 is seen in various changes which are made from the stand- 328  
329 ard authenticity ingredients used, the authenticity traditions 329  
330 involved, and the cooking methods employed. 330

331 The nature of the native Riau Malay society is to 331  
332 strongly value and preserve local culture, including the 332  
333 values associated with traditional Riau Malay food, 333  
334 depicted in everyday customs and behavior, from the 334  
335 choice of ingredients, the preparation of food, and the 335  
336 presentation of it, culminating in the unique trademark 336  
337 sense-and-feel of the food that carries that authenticity 337  
338 Riau Malay identity, from the first bite to the last. 338

339 Based on the results of interviews with figures from 339  
340 Riau Malay culture that the appreciation Riau Malay na- 340  
341 tives have for the customs and culture involved in the 341  
342 preparation and processing, presentation and consump- 342  
343 tion of the food may also be seen in the efforts of a 343  
344 woman in preparing such a traditional menu. The 344  
345 process of cleaning and cutting fish for a traditional Riau 345  
346 Malay menu done correctly, such as the fish is cut in 346  
347 slant and a straight cut does not conform to custom, sig- 347  
348 nifies contempt for the consumer. The following is one 348  
349 of the quotations from the interviews: 349

350 Each type of food has a very traditional way of 350  
351 processing and serving. Traditional Riau Malay dishes 351  
352 may be divided into two categories: everyday cuisine, 352  
353 and cuisine for ceremonies or rituals. Each type has a 353  
354 different traditional cooking styles. 354

355 Based on the results of interviews, related to food cul- 355  
356 ture in Riau Malay food, it can be seen that Riau Malay 356  
357 individuals and groups have a habit of choosing their 357  
358 food, including processing, obtaining, serving, and con- 358  
359 suming. This food culture emphasized from generation 359  
360 to generation as a cultural heritage of Riau Malay food. 360

361 The traditional cooking styles of Riau Malay include 361  
362 roasting, smoking, sun-drying, cooking in underground 362  
363 ovens, boiling, steaming, frying, and wrapping fruit for ac- 363  
364 celerated ripening. From a historical perspective, roasting 364  
365 is identified as the oldest cooking process, involving sim- 365  
366 ply the placing of food in or near coals. As for the 366  
367 methods of preservation, smoking over fires is identified 367  
368 as the most ancient process of enabling food to last longer. 368  
369 Cooking in underground ovens is another method trad- 369  
370 itionally employed by the Riau Malay, especially in cook- 370  
371 ing bananas, tubers, cereals, and even fish. It involves 371  
372 covering food with soil and ashes and then lighting a fire 372  
373 on top. Cooking in this manner takes 1.5 h for a full bake. 373  
374 Some examples of traditional Riau Malay food are 374

375 introduced in two different types, cake pastry and main  
376 course savory dishes, and divided into two categories,  
377 everyday cuisine, and cuisine for ceremonies or rituals.

378 Categories of cake pastries are as follows: Kue Bangkit  
379 (“rising pastry”): this dry pastry is made from tapioca  
380 flour, eggs, sugar, and coconut milk. Authentically con-  
381 sumed by kings and nobility, it has become an integral  
382 part of traditional festivals and religious holidays. It is  
383 called *kue bangkit* (“rising pastry”) because it rises to  
384 twice its size during the baking process. It is now being  
385 mass-produced as an everyday food in a variety of fla-  
386 vors and shapes. Bolu Kemojo (“Kemojo sponge cake”):  
387 the *kemojo* sponge cake is made of wheat flour, eggs,  
388 and sugar. The amount of sugar used serves as a natural  
389 preservative. It is named *kemojo* because its shape looks  
390 like the *kemoja* flower. This cake authentically had only  
391 one flavor, the essence of pandan. Now, it has undergone  
392 commodification and comes in many flavors. It is usually  
393 featured at traditional events such as weddings and reli-  
394 gious holidays. Kue Asidah (“Asidah pastry”): the *asidah*  
395 pastry is made of wheat flour, eggs, cloves, cinnamon,  
396 and fried onions. It is usually present at traditional  
397 events such as weddings and religious holidays. Lempuk  
398 Durian: this dish is made just of durian and sugar. The  
399 flesh of a ripe durian fruit is stirred with white sugar  
400 until it forms a thick, uniform mixture. The high sugar  
401 content serves as a natural preservative. It is wrapped  
402 with areca leaves. Kue Jala Kinca Durian (“durian-sauce  
403 net pastry”): this pastry is made from wheat flour and  
404 eggs and is served in a durian sauce cooked with coco-  
405 nut milk and palm sugar. It is called a “net pastry” be-  
406 cause it is formed full holes like netting. Bolu Berendam  
407 (“soaked sponge cake”): this trademark Riau snack is no  
408 ordinary sponge cake, as it is made from just a little  
409 flour, a lot of eggs, and sugar and served wet, in a sweet  
410 sauce made with cloves, cinnamon, and fennel. It has  
411 been served in Riau regularly dating back to the era of  
412 the Indragiri Hulu kingdom. Some of the pastries may  
413 be seen in Fig. 1.

F1

414 Categories of main course savory dishes are as follows:  
415 Asam Pedas Ikan (“spicy-sour fish”): this dish is made of  
416 a trademark combination of spices such as onion, garlic,  
417 ginger, turmeric, and chili peppers, resulting in a unique  
418 sour and spicy flavor. The fish typically used are *panga-*  
419 *sius* or *mystus* catfish native to the waters of Riau Malay.  
420 Ikan Selais Asap (“smoked fish”): *Ikan selais asap*  
421 is smoked for longevity without the need of preservatives.  
422 It is usually served with a chili pepper paste or made  
423 into a kind of curry along with cassava greens. Mie Sagu  
424 (“sago noodles”): this dish is made of sago flour shaped  
425 into noodles. They are cooked with a mixture of spices  
426 and may be boiled or fried. Nasi Lemak Pekanbaru: this  
427 rice dish is cooked with coconut milk and seasoning. It  
428 is served along with side dishes such as chicken, eggs,

chili peppers, and vegetables. Some of the names of the  
main course savory dishes can be seen in Fig. 2.

F2

431 The concept of culinary heritage as an intangible heri-  
432 tage calls for attentiveness to the roles of individuals in  
433 committing to guarding the values inherent therein for  
434 the preservation of the aforementioned culinary heritage  
435 [29]. Culinary heritage serves as a symbol of cultural  
436 identity expressing the heart of people. For the people of  
437 Riau Malay, their heart is seen in the values passed down  
438 from generation to generation, which have taken root in  
439 a people, a tribe, forming a standard, an example that  
440 has been followed in generations past and will continue  
441 to be followed for generations to come [41].

#### 442 The authenticity and commodification of traditional Riau 443 Malay food

444 The authenticity of ethnic food is a legacy of regional  
445 wealth has a difference from each region. Understanding  
446 the definition of ethnic food, referring to [42] is an eth-  
447 nic food derived from the ability of local knowledge in  
448 processing local resources such as raw materials for  
449 basic ingredients of food ingredients through plants and  
450 animal sources into an ethnic food accepted by con-  
451 sumers outside ethnic groups.

452 The use of authenticity was generally replaced by the  
453 originality of food culture [43]. Abarca [43] believed au-  
454 thenticity to impose an attitude on authentic culinary  
455 that inhibits creativity to make another version. Mean-  
456 while, ethnic food is associated with local knowledge in  
457 the process of using local resources as a raw material for  
458 food. We believe that when local knowledge is no longer  
459 important on the processing of ethnic food, this will  
460 eliminate the authenticity of the ethnic food.

461 In the context of Riau Malay food, it is known that the  
462 authenticity of Riau Malay food comes from the composi-  
463 tion of basic ingredients that thrive and come from the  
464 land and natural of Riau. Sago, tapioca flour, durian, fish  
465 sources, which are patin fish and selais fish, are the main  
466 source of staple foods which are ethnic foods in Riau  
467 Malay, as well as spices and pandan leaves that often be-  
468 come natural coloring in the Malay ethnic food of Riau.

469 Nowadays, ethnic food is not just talking about how to  
470 prepare, cook, serve, and preserve which concerns the  
471 culture and past history even though ethnic food cannot  
472 be separated from legacy, culture, ecology, and environ-  
473 ment because modernization requires other meanings  
474 such as related matters about modesty in the manner of  
475 eating [42, 43].

476 Each region provides different local materials accord-  
477 ing to geographical conditions. As in Riau Malay food,  
478 the source of local raw materials for Riau’s Malay ethnic  
479 food can not only be obtained from local geographic  
480 sources and while also provided from outside the geo-  
481 graphical area of Riau Malay in general. However, local



**Fig. 1** Name of food (pastries). **a** Kue Bangkit (“rising pastry”): this dry pastry is made from tapioca flour, eggs, sugar, and coconut milk. Authentically consumed by kings and nobility, it has become an integral part of traditional festivals and religious holidays. It is called *kue bangkit* (“rising pastry”) because it rises to twice its size during the baking process. It is now being mass-produced as an everyday food in a variety of flavors and shapes. **b** Bolu Kemojo (“Kemojo sponge cake”): the *kemojo* sponge cake is made of wheat flour, eggs, and sugar. The amount of sugar used serves as a natural preservative. It is named *kemojo* because its shape looks like the *kemojo* flower. This cake authentically had only one flavor, the essence of pandan. Now, it has undergone commodification and comes in many flavors. It is usually featured at traditional events such as weddings and religious holidays. **c** Lempuk Durian: This dish is made just of durian and sugar. The flesh of a ripe durian fruit is stirred with white sugar until it forms a thick, uniform mixture. The high sugar content serves as a natural preservative. It is wrapped with areca leaves

Q4].8  
f1.9

482 knowledge in the process of processing and presentation  
483 ethnic foods of Riau Malay as a strength of heritage  
484 value of authenticity comes from past history handed  
485 down from generation to generation.

486 Ethnic food has a unique identity including Riau Malay  
487 food and has an appeal that assimilates to culture through  
488 past experience. Currently, consuming ethnic food is not  
489 just to preserve it but to provide and reinforce happiness to  
490 past memories that effectively increase emotional effective  
491 [44]. Even today, some ethnic food leads to a commodity  
492 product that continues to develop in the food industry be-  
493 cause of diverse ethnicity. According to [26, 42], food in-  
494 dustry developing gradually which believed that ethnic food  
495 provides diverse ethnicity became a potential good to de-  
496 velop in food industry to sustain in gain markets globally.  
497 Failures in sustained competitive advantage came as the  
498 food industry failed to bring changes to the pattern of eth-  
499 nic food production and consumption which eliminated  
500 the originality of heritage value as a cultural identity.

501 Under current conditions, traditional Riau Malay food is  
502 undergoing commodification as it seeks its place in the

world of diverse foods in the global era. Over a century ago, 503  
the tradition of culinary selection was still based on social 504  
stratification indicators. From this historical value, types of 505  
traditional foods emerged in the context of kingdoms, 506  
which maintained the custom of presenting these foods at 507  
certain ceremonial celebrations for centuries. This practice 508 [Q6]  
came about in light of the basic stratification of Riau Malay 509  
society into two social classes: the common people, the 510  
governing class, and the nobility, a class of sultans. This set- 511  
ting carried consequences for the everyday lives of society, 512  
including in the choice of foods. The higher the social class, 513  
the greater the privilege, and the more choice in culinary 514  
selection. Today, however, traditional Riau Malay food is 515  
undergoing a transformation. The transformation of tradi- 516  
tional Riau Malay food is being brought about by the com- 517  
modification of the global era as necessary as part of 518  
survival by adaptation to market interests while fighting 519  
forces of modernization and commercialization that could 520  
lead to the disappearance of such food. 521

The era of globalization has entered the scene rapidly, 522  
bringing a great change in every aspect and realm of life. 523





**Fig. 2** Name of food (savory dishes) **a** Asam Pedas Ikan (“spicy-sour fish”): this dish is made of a trademark combination of spices such as onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric, and chili peppers, resulting in a unique sour and spicy flavor. The fish typically used are *pangasius* or *mystus* catfish native to the waters of Riau Malay. **b** Ikan Selais Asap (“smoked fish”): *Ikan selais asap* is smoked for longevity without the need of preservatives. It is usually served with a chili pepper paste or made into a kind of curry along with cassava greens. **c** Mie Sagu (“sago noodles”): this dish is made of sago flour shaped into noodles. They are cooked with a mixture of spices and may be boiled or fried

f2.1  
f2.2  
f2.3  
f2.4  
f2.5  
f2.6

524 Protection of this intangible cultural heritage is specifically  
525 a guarding against globalization and social transformation  
526 processes and is comparable to the intolerance of threats to  
527 natural resources and of the disappearance and destruction  
528 of intangible cultural heritage in the face of the homogeniz-  
529 ing effect of globalization (UNESCO, 2008).

530 In light of this issue, the preservation and protection  
531 of the heritage of traditional Riau Malay food are begin-  
532 ning to be taken more seriously. In general, traditional  
533 Riau Malay food is a topic of debate, owing to its tracing  
534 its general historical roots back to other Asian countries  
535 such as Malaysia, Singapore, and India [45]. This debate  
536 consists of each country seeking to validate its claim to  
537 the traditional food as part of its own identity [46].

538 Food carries the dynamic potential for development in  
539 the world of multiculturalism [47]. However, despite this  
540 dynamic potential, there remains a strong demand  
541 among consumers for the faithfulness of the traditional  
542 food to its authenticity identity, in appreciation for its  
543 value as a cultural heritage [48]. Food as a cultural heri-  
544 tage and sign of ethnic identity has become a very im-  
545 portant topic for discussion as the era of globalization  
546 makes it very possible for the commodification of

547 traditional food to obliterate its authenticity values. The  
548 threat toward the authenticity of traditional food has be-  
549 come an object of interest compelling many parties to  
550 give greater attention to the protection and preservation  
551 thereof [49].

552 The Riau Malay are one of the ethnic peoples of  
553 Indonesia, one piece of the multiethnic mosaic of South-  
554 east Asia. Some ethnic similarities may be found in cer-  
555 tain neighboring countries in Southeast Asia such as  
556 Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam, which also  
557 generally feature Malay ethnic groups. As for the tradi-  
558 tional cuisine of Riau Malay, one may no doubt discern  
559 the influence of a variety of Malay cultures from  
560 throughout Southeast Asia, making it difficult to declare  
561 the authenticity of food [50], all the more in the current  
562 era when commodification is gaining ground as a global  
563 trend. This debate enters into a variety of realms, includ-  
564 ing those of academy, business, community, and individ-  
565 ual [51]. In the case of Riau Malay, the countries of  
566 Indonesia and Malaysia are seen in the general context  
567 of similarity, despite differing in specifics. Both are eth-  
568 nically Malay. This issue leads to debate especially in de-  
569 termining where true authenticity and identity lie.

570 On the topic of cuisine, traditional Malay food gener-  
571 ally emerged in the fifteenth century in the era of the  
572 Melaka Sultanate as the central trading power in the  
573 Malay archipelago, yet the authenticity of Malay cuisine  
574 is believed to pre-date the Melaka Sultanate, as its form  
575 is considered to have existed contemporaneously with  
576 the emergence of society at that time, not with the sul-  
577 tanate's rise to power. Malay cuisine is also found in  
578 Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam, which are  
579 known to be in the same Malay archipelago. Malay cuis-  
580 ine is *halal* in accordance with the dietary guidelines of  
581 Islam. Thus, its sources of proteins are selected from  
582 beef, chicken, water buffalo, and goats, and alcohol is ab-  
583 sent, being forbidden in Malay cuisine. Each traditional  
584 Malay region has its own traditional cuisine. The pri-  
585 mary common features are the rich flavor and generous  
586 use of spices. The Riau Malay in Indonesia tends to em-  
587 ploy a spicy-sour flavor in a liberal combination of  
588 spices, with a relatively low level of coconut milk con-  
589 tent for sweets and snacks. It is known that other Malay  
590 cuisines do not employ as much use of spices as is  
591 employed by the Riau Malay.

592 The majority of traditional Riau Malay foods with  
593 which we are familiar at this point are generally known  
594 as foods that have been passed down from previous gen-  
595 erations. However, among these foods are those that are  
596 undergoing commodification, change in production for  
597 the purpose of commercialization in response to the  
598 changing tastes of the modern market. For example, the  
599 *kue bangkit* ("rising pastry") authentically featured only  
600 one flavor, but is now available in a variety of flavors, in-  
601 cluding chocolate, durian, green tea, lime, and others.  
602 *Kue bangkit* has been the preferred pastry of the king-  
603 dom of Siak for over five centuries, regularly consumed  
604 and served at ritual royal events and major religious cel-  
605 ebrations. Eventually, the pastry came to be known  
606 among commoners as a group of women in a social cir-  
607 cle began producing it for the general market as a trade-  
608 mark traditional Riau Malay food.

609 The same phenomenon took place with the *bolu*  
610 *kemojo* ("*kemojo* sponge cake"). Authentically, the *bolu*  
611 *kemojo* was cooked in a traditional manner, baked over  
612 coals, and available in only one flavor, that of pandan  
613 leaves, with sugar serving as a preservative. At present,  
614 *bolu kemojo* may be found in a variety of flavors such as  
615 chocolate flavors, durian flavors, corn flavors, and is no  
616 longer cooked over coals, but in an oven for ease of  
617 large-scale production. In a few cases, this change may  
618 be seen as instances of commodification, triggered by  
619 the development of consumer interests in this global  
620 market era. Business actors in the traditional food indus-  
621 try see a great business opportunity in this area, if they  
622 are able to successfully commercialize by enacting com-  
623 modification in accordance with market interests.

624 Although commercialization carries the potential for a  
625 loss of authenticity [29], it remains important enough to  
626 require consideration and the search for a solution.

627 In certain other areas, however, the authenticity of  
628 traditional Riau Malay foods has been preserved, such as  
629 the traditional method of preparing certain dishes, per-  
630 petuating the cooking methods passed down from previ-  
631 ous generations, not involving the use of modern tools  
632 or technology, even considering them as something to  
633 be avoided in the cooking process. Such is the case with  
634 the *asidah* pastry, which is believed to be ruined by any  
635 involvement of modern machinery.

636 The commodification of certain traditional Riau Malay  
637 foods is known to have involved mobility of change in  
638 the direction of commercialization and modernization,  
639 while retaining the authenticity identity and historic  
640 values contained therein. Yet amid the change, it is con-  
641 sequentially becoming more and more difficult to dis-  
642 cern the authenticity values. This is what must be  
643 continually held in consideration, although the reality is  
644 that food is an item the authenticity of which is difficult  
645 to honestly describe [52].

646 Other than Malaysia, Singapore also constitutes a multi-  
647 ethnic nation, the cuisine of which is believed to be of the  
648 same family as that of Malaysia [42, 50, 51], as well as  
649 Indonesia. Take, for instance, the popular controversy of  
650 *nasi lemak*, the origin of which is often debated, carrying  
651 iconicity in each country. Each country lays forth its own  
652 argument claiming precedence and authenticity of the  
653 dish as their own. Such a debate will be difficult to resolve,  
654 as the development of cuisine in a multiethnic environ-  
655 ment is dynamic in nature [47], with variety in the ingredi-  
656 ents used, the technology involved, and the ongoing  
657 evolution of culinary knowledge each contributing to the  
658 difficulty of uncovering the authenticity form [52].

#### 659 The sustainability of traditional Riau Malay food

660 The sustainability of a business venture requires self-  
661 awareness of one's place in a complex system with the  
662 potential to create economic, social, and environmental  
663 wealth [55]. It is no different in the food industry; the  
664 business venture must be able to create, distribute, and  
665 retain value for all stakeholders [53–55]. A production  
666 company no longer views itself as separated from the  
667 system [55], but much join in common interests with  
668 partners and consumers to create a wide-reaching sys-  
669 tem of values [59].

670 A business's ability to compete depends largely upon  
671 its ability to simultaneously operate in multiple dimen-  
672 sions, those of cost, quality, exporting, handling, speed,  
673 innovation, and flexibility in adapting to a variety of de-  
674 mands [57, 58].

675 In this discussion, the resources-based view (RBV)  
676 constitutes a useful theoretical framework, considering a

677 diversity of resources to be essential in achieving excel-  
 678 lence in sustainable competitiveness with the following  
 679 characteristic value, rarity, inimitable, and nonsubstitu-  
 680 tion [59, 60]. A business' resources are identified as valu-  
 681 able if an environment undergoes change; this analysis is  
 682 based on the assessment of dynamic opportunities and  
 683 threats. It should be understood that this phenomenon  
 684 is in accordance with the RBV view of a business' re-  
 685 sources [64].

686 In the context of the sustainability of traditional Riau  
 687 Malay food, Riau's traditional Malay foods, business  
 688 people said that the main challenge faced today was the  
 689 main challenge being faced presently is the optimization  
 690 of the potential of local resources, from the availability  
 691 of ingredients, to local ability, knowledge, and perform-  
 692 ance. The ongoing debate over the origin of certain  
 693 dishes with its various claims is another challenge that  
 694 must be overcome if the traditional food of Riau Malay  
 695 is to take on a clear identity distinct from alternatives.  
 696 This is achievable if the business actors in the Riau  
 697 Malay food industry are able to activate the potential of  
 698 their diverse resources, set themselves apart from com-  
 699 petitors, cultivate a unique set of values that distin-  
 700 guishes them from the competition, and maintain an  
 701 immovable stance such as is irreplicable by those who  
 702 would seek to copy the strategy [64]. Retaining key his-  
 703 torical values will always produce a trademark quality.  
 704 The current condition of traditional Riau Malay cuisine  
 705 remains well-protected with regard to its authenticity,  
 706 despite the various elements that have undergone com-  
 707 modification. We can state with certainty that this will  
 708 not undermine its authenticity values.

709 The concept of resource-based study focuses on the  
 710 formation of organizational ability, especially the  
 711 realization of competitive business advantage, as a result  
 712 of achieving a unique combination of resources and  
 713 business assets, difficult to duplicate, replace, or find  
 714 elsewhere. The opportunities and threats of globalization  
 715 continue to elevate, pushing business actors to  
 716 strengthen their resources and abilities and compensate  
 717 for their weaknesses.

## 718 Conclusion

719 Traditional Riau Malay food carries a historical back-  
 720 ground carrying similarity to those of neighboring coun-  
 721 tries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei  
 722 Darussalam. Nevertheless, each country and region  
 723 boasts its own distinct flavor and culinary tradition and  
 724 combination of seasonings, such that one may discern  
 725 the authenticity of each region. Traditional Riau Malay  
 726 food is currently being well-protected in terms of sus-  
 727 tainable competitiveness in the global market era. Its  
 728 trademark flavor is inseparable from the rich historic  
 729 values that have been passed down in shared memories

from generation to generation. These values will not be  
 replaced easily, even by the process of commodification  
 that eventually tends toward commercialization and  
 modernization, which have the potential to effect the  
 loss of the authenticity of this cuisine.

In spite of the challenges raised by modern culinary  
 variety and trending flavors, the traditional cuisine of  
 the Riau Malay retains its sustainable competitiveness in  
 the global market. Its historic values, the memory of the  
 past, and the culmination of authentic experience passed  
 down through the generations lends it a unique and cap-  
 tivating strength translating into a sustainable position  
 in the global market.

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## Authors' contributions

Providing novel knowledge about food culture, Malay food, especially about  
 commodification, authenticity, and sustainability in traditional Malay foods of  
 Riau. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature and research  
 interest in food culture. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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We do not wish to share our data, for some confidential statement from  
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The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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